Chapter 29

AHHHHHHHH

Chapter 29 Syphilis
HFF!
HFF!

...SHOULD A PLUCKED FLOWER BECOME WITH CHILD, SHE WOULD BE NIGH WORTHLESS.
I BET IT'S BECAUSE OF THAT CONVERSATION.
SIGH
...NO, A DREAM ABOUT SOMETHING THAT WAS SAID TO HAVE HAPPENED WHEN I WAS A BABY.
A DREAM FROM LONG AGO.

GOOD MORNING.

PHEW!
OH RIGHT, I'M HOME.
MORNIN', PA.

I WAS ABLE TO TAKE THIS TIME FOR MYSELF BECAUSE SUIREN GAVE ME PERMISSION.
PERSONAL MAIDS LIKE ME AREN'T NORMALLY ALLOWED DAYS OFF.
LIFE GOES ON EVEN WHEN YOUR MASTER HAS A HOLIDAY FROM WORK, AFTER ALL.
THIS IS MY FIRST TRIP BACK SINCE I STARTED SERVING IN THE OUTER COURT.
...WOULD YOU STOP BY VERDIGRIS FOR ME?
IF YOU'VE GOT NOTHING TO DO...
SURE.
SO WHAT DO YOU HAVE PLANNED FOR TODAY?
NOT MUCH.
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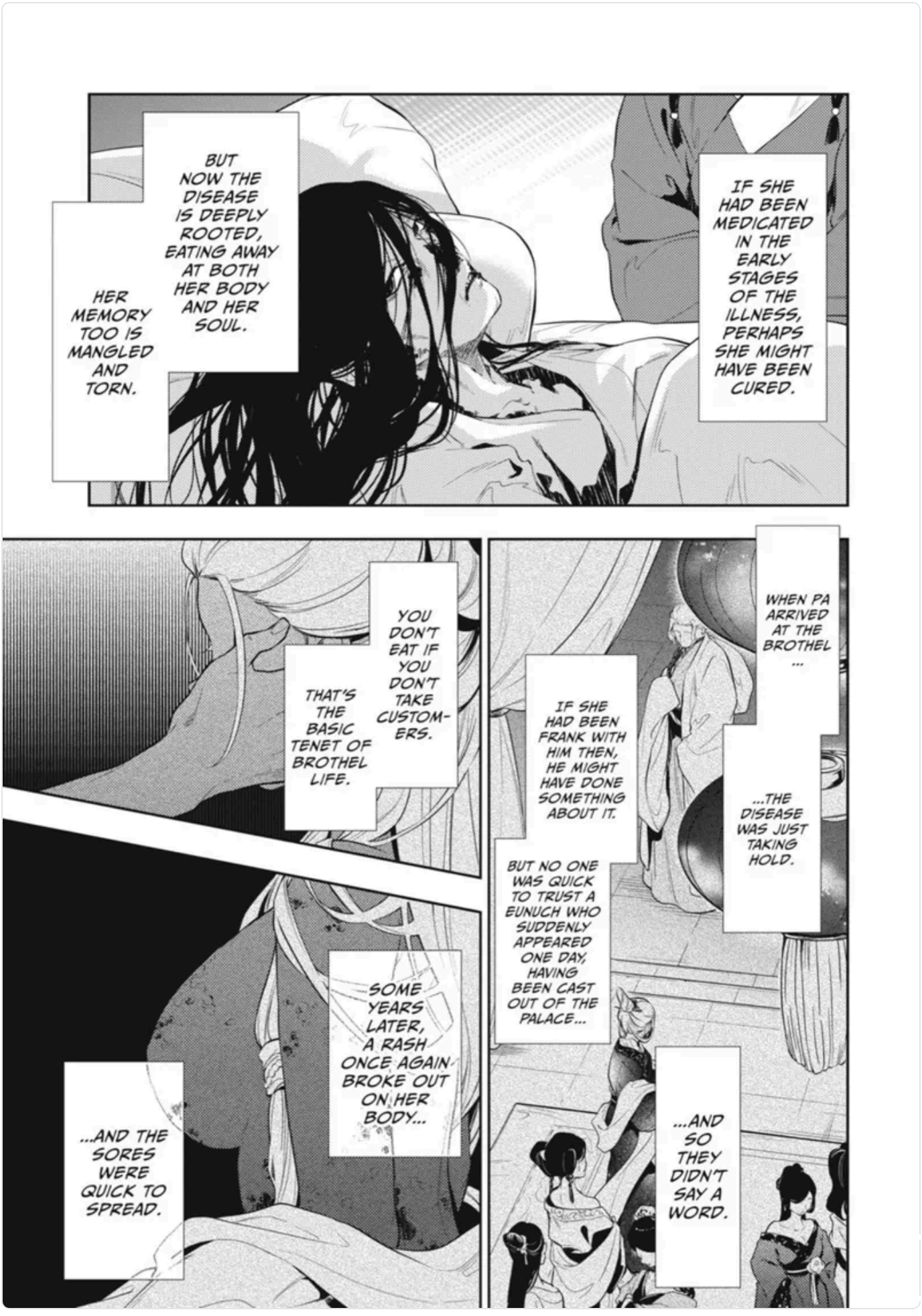
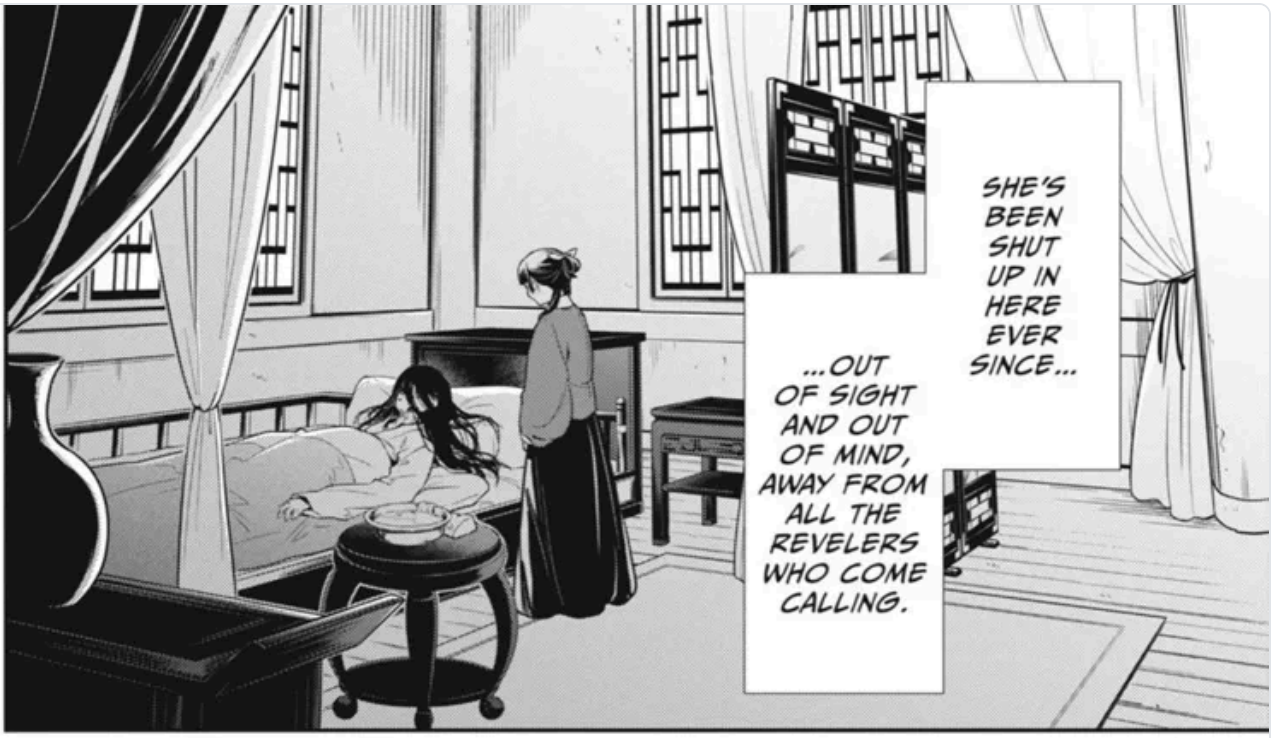
BUT THAT'S NOT WHERE HE'S ASKING ME TO GO TODAY.
VERDIGRIS
...IS RUN FROM INSIDE VERDI-GRIS.
PA'S APOTH-ECARY...
...LIES AN OUT-BUILDING WHERE NO PATRON IS ALLOWED TO SET FOOT.
...AND DOWN A CORRI-DOR THAT LOOKS OUT ONTO THE MANICURED COURTYARD...
PAST THE RESPLEN-DENT ENTRANCE HALL WITH ITS WELLHOLE DESIGN...
CREAK
キィ…

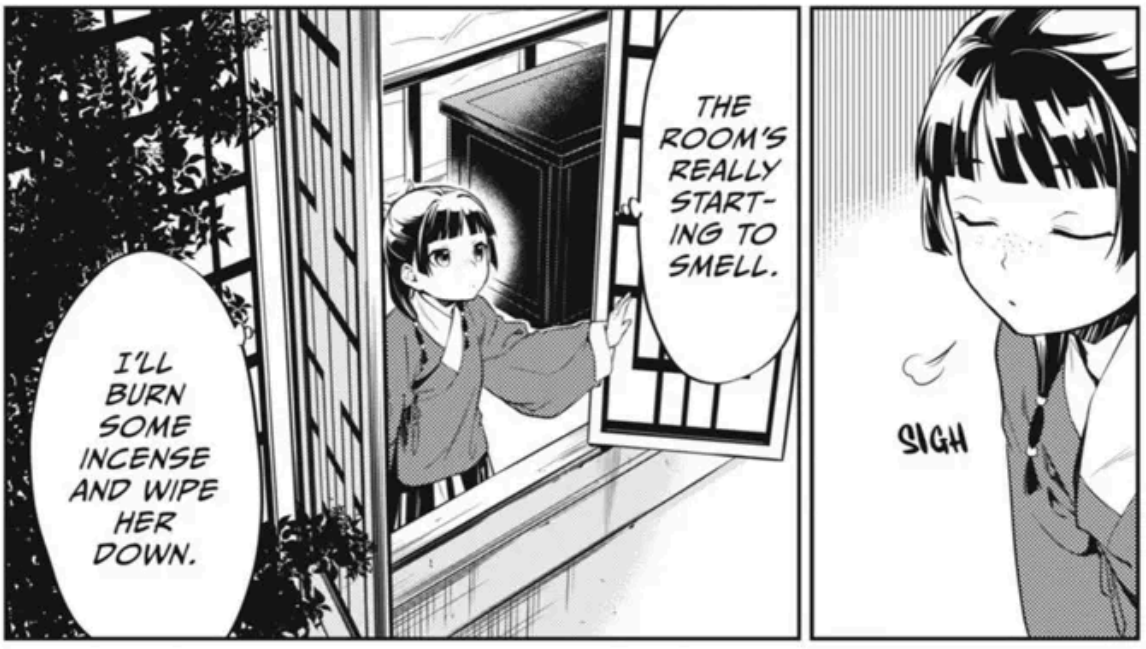
I'VE BROUGHT YOUR MEDICINE.
ONCE UPON A TIME, SHE WOULD CHASE ME OFF OUT OF HATRED...
...BUT IT'S BEEN MANY YEARS SINCE SHE'S EVEN HAD THAT KIND OF ENERGY.
DID YOUR WORDS ABANDON YOU LONG AGO TOO?
GOOD MORNING.

AND YET, THERE'S NOTHING ELSE WE CAN DO FOR HER. WE KNOW OF NO OTHER TREAT-MENTS.
RUSTLE
RUSTLE
IT'S LESS TOXIC, AND ITS EFFECTS MORE POTENT...
...BUT IN HER CURRENT STATE, IT'S NOT MUCH HELP OR CONSO-LATION.
THIS POWDER I'M ADMINIS-TERING...
...IS A MEDICINE PA USES IN PLACE OF QUICK-SILVER AND ARSENIC.
...BUT ITS PAST IS A SORDID ONE, MARRED BY EVENTS THAT TOOK PLACE OVER A DECADE EARLIER.
THE VERDIGRIS OF TODAY IS VENERABLE ENOUGH TO BE PARTICULAR ABOUT ITS CLIENTELE...
NOW ALMOST 40, THIS NOSE-LESS WOMAN ...
...WAS ONCE A CELEBRATED COURTESAN WHO WAS PAMPERED LIKE A PRINCESS.
ALL THOSE YEARS AGO, THIS WOMAN TOOK A PATRON TO HER BED...
...ONLY TO CONTRACT SYPHILIS THROUGH SHEER MISFOR-TUNE.


IF SHE HAD BEEN MEDICATED IN THE EARLY STAGES OF THE ILLNESS, PERHAPS SHE MIGHT HAVE BEEN CURED.
BUT NOW THE DISEASE IS DEEPLY ROOTED, EATING AWAY AT BOTH HER BODY AND HER SOUL.
HER MEMORY TOO IS MANGLED AND TORN.
WHEN PA ARRIVED AT THE BROTHEL ...
IF SHE HAD BEEN FRANK WITH HIM THEN, HE MIGHT HAVE DONE SOMETHING ABOUT IT.
...THE DISEASE WAS JUST TAKING HOLD.
BUT NO ONE WAS QUICK TO TRUST A EUNUCH WHO SUDDENLY APPEARED ONE DAY, HAVING BEEN CAST OUT OF THE PALACE...
...AND SO THEY DIDN'T SAY A WORD.
YOU DON'T EAT IF YOU DON'T TAKE CUSTOM-ERS.
THAT'S THE BASIC TENET OF BROTHEL LIFE.
SOME YEARS LATER, A RASH ONCE AGAIN BROKE OUT ON HER BODY...
...AND THE SORES WERE QUICK TO SPREAD.


SHE'S BEEN SHUT UP IN HERE EVER SINCE...
...OUT OF SIGHT AND OUT OF MIND, AWAY FROM ALL THE REVELERS WHO COME CALLING.

NORMALLY, COURTE-SANS WHO CAN NO LONGER WORK ARE DRIVEN OUT.
THAT SHE ENDED UP HERE AND NOT IN A DIRTY DITCH COULD BE TAKEN AS TESTAMENT TO THE MADAM'S MERCY.


I'LL BURN SOME INCENSE AND WIPE HER DOWN.
THE ROOM'S REALLY START-ING TO SMELL.
SIGH

IT HAS A SLIGHTLY SWEET AND ELEGANT FRA-GRANCE.
WAFT
...BUT IT'S NOT USUALLY BURNED SINCE THE SMELL DOESN'T MIX WELL WITH SOME MEDICINES.
THIS INCENSE WAS A GIFT FROM A CERTAIN NOBLE ...
PAD パタ
PAD パタ
PAD パタ
OH BOY. WHAT'S GOING ON?
CREAK キィ...
UM... SIS TOLD ME TO TELL YOU...

OH.
I SEE. THANK YOU.
...NOT TO COME BACK OUT TO THE HALL.
THERE'S SOME STRANGE MAN WITH A MONOCLE HERE.
SPLASH
I KNOW JUST WHO SHE'S TALKING ABOUT, THIS ODD MAN WITH THE MONOCLE.
HE'S BEEN A REGULAR PATRON HERE FOR A LONG TIME...
...AND I'D PREFER TO AVOID BUMPING INTO HIM WHENEVER POSSIBLE.
I WON'T RUN INTO HIM IN HERE, THOUGH.
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むっ
SIT

STUPID WOMAN.

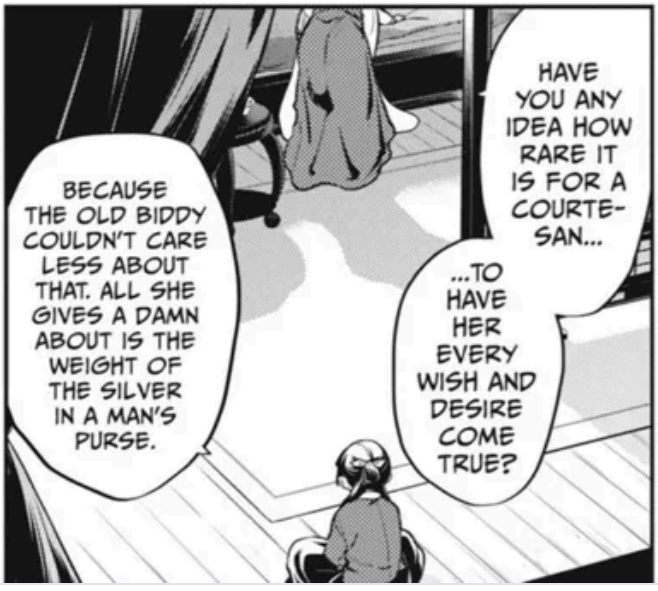
THANKS FOR WAITING IN HERE, MAOMAO.
HELLO, MEIMEI.
HE'S GONE NOW.
HE BROUGHT UP THAT OFFER AGAIN FOR YOU.
ぞわ SHUDDER
ぞわ SHUDDER
HE'S INCORRIGIBLE, ISN'T HE, THAT OLD CREEP?
I'M SURPRISED YOU CAN BEAR HIM, SIS.
HIS FLAWS ASIDE, HE'S A GOOD CLIENT.
AND AS LONG AS HE PAYS UP, THE OLD LADY WON'T COMPLAIN.

...THAT MUST BE WHY SHE'S BEEN NAGGING ME THESE PAST FEW YEARS TO TAKE UP THE COURTESAN LIFE, HUH?

UGH.
I SHUDDER TO THINK OF HOW I WOULD ALREADY BE SOLD OFF TO THAT CRETIN BY NOW WERE I NOT EMPLOYED ELSEWHERE.

...IS A LITTLE OFF FROM THE REST OF US.
WHAT MOST COURTE-SANS REGARD AS A "PRIZED MATCH" ...

FROM ANOTHER PERSPEC-TIVE, IT COULD BE SEEN AS A PRIZED MATCH!
GLARE
EXCUSE ME?
DON'T LOOK AT ME LIKE THAT.


HAVE YOU ANY IDEA HOW RARE IT IS FOR A COURTE-SAN...
...TO HAVE HER EVERY WISH AND DESIRE COME TRUE?
BECAUSE THE OLD BIDDY COULDN'T CARE LESS ABOUT THAT. ALL SHE GIVES A DAMN ABOUT IS THE WEIGHT OF THE SILVER IN A MAN'S PURSE.

WELL, SHE'S SAVING UP FOR HER BOAT FARE TO PARADISE, SO WE CAN'T BEGRUDGE HER THAT.
SIGH
I'M SURE SHE'LL BE TRYING TO SELL ONE OF US OFF BEFORE LONG.
WE'RE ALL GETTING ON IN YEARS.
NEARLY 30, MEIMEI IS AT THE AGE WHEN MOST COURTESANS CONSIDER RETIRING FROM THIS LIFE.
HER BEAUTY HAS YET TO FORSAKE HER...
...BUT I'M SURE THE OLD MADAM WILL WANT TO SELL HER OFF BEFORE HER LOOKS FADE.
I THINK...
...I'LL KEEP WORKING JUST A LITTLE WHILE LONGER.
WHAT IF YOU STRIKE OUT ON YOUR OWN?
I WOULDN'T WANT TO DO ANYTHING TO EARN GRANNY'S IRE.

BUT I DIDN'T WANT TO DWELL ON IT.
I GOT THE SENSE ...
...THAT THERE WERE MIXED EMOTIONS BEHIND HER SMILE.
...IS IT LOVE?
I'M SURE I...
...LEFT THAT FEELING BEHIND SOME-WHERE.

THAT'S NOT AT ALL WHY I WENT THERE.
...ALSO OFFERED SERVICES ON PAR WITH THOSE FOUND IN THE PLEASURE DISTRICT.
I HAD NO IDEA THAT YESTERDAY'S RESTAURANT...
...ALL THE WAY THERE. GRRRRRRGH!
...THAT MAID WITH ME...
AND TO THINK THAT I BROUGHT
...OH, ABOUT THAT...
ANYWAY, HOW WAS YOUR WALK THROUGH THE CITY, SIR?
ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE NOT UP TO SOMETHING?
GAO SHUN.
THE ONE TO PROPOSE THE IDEA WAS...
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...BUT WAS THERE EVER SUCH A TALENTED MEDICAL MAN AMONG THE EUNUCHS?
TRAINING UNDER A FORMER PHYSICIAN WOULD EXPLAIN HER EXPERTISE.
CURI-OUS, NO?
IT SEEMS THE GIRL'S ADOPTIVE FATHER IS A EUNUCH AND A FORMER COURT PHYSICIAN.
XIAO-MAO'S, YOU MEAN?
I THINK I CAN LEAVE HIM TO LOOK INTO IT FOR ME.
HMM...
THE FACT IS, ALL THE PHYSICIANS OF THE INNER PALACE ARE SUBPAR.
...IT'S WHAT THE APOTH-ECARY'S DAUGHTER SAID.
BUT IF THERE'S ONE THING THAT STILL STICKS IN MY MIND...
THE REA-SON FOR THIS IS SIMPLE.
A MAN WITH THE QUALIFICATIONS TO BECOME A DOCTOR HAS NO NEED TO SUBMIT TO LOSING HIS MANHOOD JUST TO PLY HIS TRADE IN THE INNER PALACE.

KNOCK KNOCK
DON'T MIND ME! I'LL INVITE MYSELF IN.
WHAT DO YOU SAY WE PICK UP WHERE WE LEFT OFF WITH THE STORY FROM THE OTHER DAY?
...MAKE SUCH A STRANGELY SOLEMN FACE?
WHY DID SHE...
FROM WHAT I HEAR, THE COURSE OF ACTION YOU TOOK WAS A TERRIBLY VILE ONE.
I ASKED SOMEONE IN THE KNOW.

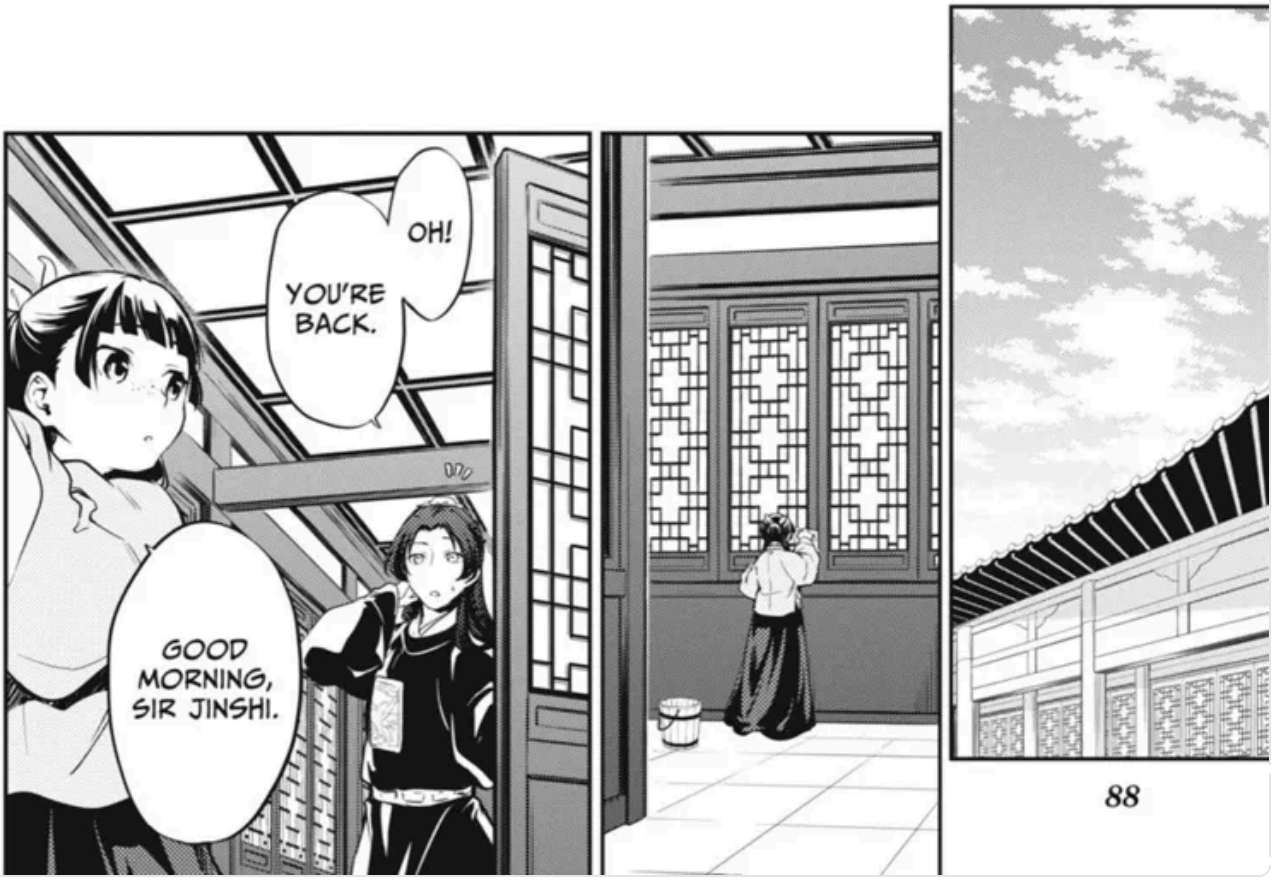
AND THE SPECULATION IS A RATHER UNWELCOME ONE.
FROM WHAT THE APOTHECARY'S GIRL SAID, I HAVE AN IDEA OF WHAT THIS CUNNING LUNATIC MUST HAVE DONE.
HIS URGING ME TO LEARN THE END OF THE STORY FROM SOMEONE FAMILIAR WITH THAT WORLD.
THE TALK OF HIS OLD "FRIEND" AT THE BROTHEL.
THE REASON HE FIRST CAME TO ME WITH THAT STORY ABOUT BUYING OUT THE CONTRACT OF A VERDIGRIS COURTESAN, FOR ONE.
BUT IT DOES ADD UP, AS MUCH AS I HATE TO ADMIT IT, AND IT EXPLAINS A LOT.
I REFUSE TO TAKE GUFF FROM THE THIEF WHO SNATCHED AWAY MY PRIZE FROM RIGHT UNDER MY NOSE.
IT TOOK ME TEN YEARS TO FINALLY CONVINCE THAT MADAM.
"VILE"? THAT'S NOT A VERY NICE THING TO SAY.

BE THAT AS IT MAY...
...THE PRIZE IS ALREADY MINE.
I'LL PAY WHATEVER YOU WISH.
I DON'T FANCY MAKING THE SAME MISTAKE AGAIN.
AND IF I SAY I WON'T ACCEPT ANY PRICE?

THEN I BELIEVE WE HAVE REACHED AN IMPASSE, YOUR HIGH-NESS.
!!
SO HE KNOWS WHO I TRULY AM. I HAD A FEELING AS MUCH.
...HOW MY DAUGHTER WOULD FEEL ABOUT THAT.
BUT...
...I DO WONDER ...
AAH.
I CAN'T BEAR IT.

WOULD YOU BE A DEAR...
...AND TELL MY LITTLE GIRL THAT I'LL BE COMING TO SEE HER SOON?
I BID YOU GOOD DAY.
THIS MEANS LAKAN IS MAOMAO'S FATHER BY BLOOD.

.....
.....
UUUUUGH...


OH!
YOU'RE BACK.
GOOD MORNING, SIR JINSHI.
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UHHH...
ER, SO...
I CAME BACK THIS MORNING SO I WOULD BE IN TIME TO TASTE YOUR BREAKFAST FOR POISON.
...AH.
MY THANKS.
A CERTAIN OFFICIAL HAS EXPRESSED A DESIRE TO MEET WITH YOU.
?
WHO MIGHT THAT BE?
WELL ...
...IT'S THE CURIOUS FELLOW I'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT LATELY.
FLINCH
ピクッ
HIS NAME IS LAKAN.

IN THAT MOMENT...
...I KNEW.
I COULD TELL EXACTLY HOW SHE FELT ABOUT THAT MAN AND HIS VERY EXISTENCE.
...I'LL THINK OF A WAY TO TURN HIM DOWN.

THANK YOU.
CASUAL
NOW IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME, I SHOULD GET BACK TO WORK.
OH.
SURE.
I'VE NEVER SEEN THAT EXPRES-SION ON HER FACE BEFORE.

SIIIGH...
I HOPE I NEVER HAVE TO SEE IT AGAIN.